



# rivers&trails

National  
Park  
Service



*rivers, trails, and conservation assistance program*

## AUSTIN WATER QUALITY PROTECTION LANDS

### Project Goal

To develop a strategic public access plan for tracts of rural and suburban land owned by the City of Austin for protection of its drinking water. To adopt and implement the highest priority proposals. Increased access to these properties will provide the public with low-impact recreational opportunities as well as educate citizens about the need to protect groundwater recharge lands.

### Background

In a precedent-setting election in 1998, citizens of the City of Austin authorized \$65 million in bond funding to acquire 15,000 acres of fee-owned lands and conservation easements to protect groundwater recharge and contributing zones, primarily south and west of the city. These aquifer recharge areas supply the Edward Aquifer and constitute the source of water for Barton Springs, a popular spring-fed swimming pool that Austinites treasure.

Most of the 7,100 acres acquired in fee were slated for development, so the City often paid development prices for the properties. To provide citizens with a greater return on their investment, the city-owned water and wastewater utility is exploring ways to allow public access to the fee-owned lands for recreation and education, provided such activities are compatible with management of the lands for their primary water protection purpose. Because the water quality protection lands are owned by the Utility Department and not the Parks Department, the Utility has little or no funding for public access management. The

Utility Department is challenging a group of citizen stakeholders to create a plan in which the recreation and educational access is implemented and maintained by citizen organizations obtaining funding and providing volunteers to support their desires uses.

### Stakeholders Tour the Slaughter Creek Unit



### National Park Service Role

The City of Austin's Utility Department has asked the NPS Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program (RTCA) to support its public input stakeholder process. RTCA will provide consultation on public input meetings and processes and help form a broad-based stakeholder committee. RTCA will also have a role in providing technical assistance to the committee's assessment of the compatibility of various recreation activities with sensitive resources.

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After the public access plan is adopted by the City's elected officials, RTCA will continue in an implementation role by facilitating teams of citizens in developing implementation strategies for the agreed upon types of recreational and environmental education access. Part of this role will involve assistance in identifying funding and recruiting and organizing volunteers for trail development and impact monitoring.

### Project Partners

- City of Austin Water & Wastewater Utility - Owner and manager of the water quality protection lands.
- Land Management Planning Team - Consultant planning team comprised of representatives from Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, the Nature Conservancy of Texas, Creating Common Ground, Loomis Austin, American YouthWorks, Natural Resource Conservation Service, and Glenrose Engineering.
- Stakeholder Committee - Approximately 25 citizens representing various recreation, conservation, and neighborhood organizations collaborating on public access plan.

### Project Results to Date

- A citizen stakeholder committee has been established and met 9 times.
- Agreement by stakeholders and planning team to a process to develop a public access plan.

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